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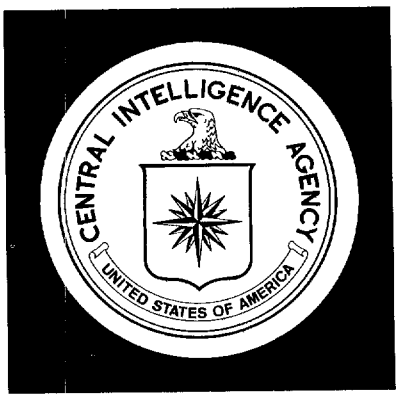


# Weekly Summary

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*April 15, 1977*

The WEEKLY SUMMARY, issued every Friday morning by the Current Reporting Group, reports and analyzes significant developments of the week through noon on Thursday. It frequently includes material coordinated with or prepared by the Office of Regional and Political Analysis, the Office of Economic Research, the Office of Strategic Research, the Office of Scientific Intelligence, the Office of Weapons Intelligence, and the Office of Geographic and Cartographic Research.

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9 **Argentina:** *Support for President Videla*

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*President Videla has strengthened his position with the Argentine military and may now be in a better position to move forward on moderate proposals for restructuring the unions and permitting civilians a limited political role.*

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# Argentina: Support for President Videla

President Videla begins his second year as Argentina's leader in a reasonably strong position. Only a few weeks ago there was widespread talk about Videla giving up one of his jobs, the presidency or his membership on the junta. Such talk has now ceased, and the President seems to be enjoying—at least for the present—the support not only of the army, but also the navy and air force, which from time to time expressed dissatisfaction with him. This military consensus around Videla means that for the time being officers with moderate views are in control in Argentina.

Videla and the junta last month marked the first anniversary of their takeover with low key, characteristically austere statements. The President's address to the nation pointed to the progress made during the past year in controlling leftist subversives and in improving the economy. As is his custom, he promised nothing, except that the armed forces would not be deterred from pursuing their own concept of economic and political progress.

Videla did suggest that a new, more constructive phase of political activity could begin. He made it clear there will be no early return to free-wheeling politics, but some civilians will be allowed to express opinions on a variety of subjects through informal channels.

On March 15, Videla assembled all army generals to review the government's performance during the past year and to outline its plans for the future. The President anticipated criticism of his performance and skillfully neutralized it. The session, which lasted an entire workday, was a success for the President. He assuaged the feelings of the air force and navy by strongly reiterating the supremacy of the junta and playing down his own role.

The President announced at the meeting that he would remain as chief executive and army commander in chief through March 1979, refuting the notion, widely discussed among Argentines in recent months, that he would relinquish either the presidency or his post in the three-man interservice junta.

Videla himself may have had a hand in encouraging public discussion of his authority. He probably judged that such a "debate" would do him no harm and might help, and he was right. The discussions never turned up a serious contender to replace him. Moreover, although some individuals indulged in personal criticisms, no really damaging criticism of Videla emerged.

The army meeting seems to have demonstrated that the present government, with Videla at the top, is still the most desirable choice and perhaps the only practical one. The public "debate" may also have served as an escape valve for Argentina's highly politicized citizenry, deprived for the past year of normal outlets for political expression.

**The Government and Labor**

The ascendancy of Videla and his moderate line will have an important impact in the crucial area of government-labor relations. Union activities have been suspended since the coup, and the military has been unable to agree on how to treat organized labor. Some military men believe labor, the long-time stronghold of Peronism, must be permanently shorn of its potential political power. Others, including Videla, favor an accommodation.

Developments on the labor scene over the past year have worked to the advantage of Videla and weakened the arguments of those calling for punitive measures. There have been numerous violations of the junta's ban on strikes, but the government has not used force, nor has labor defied the junta on the massive scale some officers anticipated in response to government-imposed economic austerity measures.

The way now seems clear for the emergence of a labor policy that is not as vindictive as the so-called "hard liners" had demanded. The new labor code, although it will still be restrictive, will probably allow unions to join together in federations. Unions will continue to be prohibited from blatant political activity.



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It is doubtful that larger groupings like the Peronist General Workers' Confederation, through which labor flexed its political muscle during the Peron regimes, will have government backing, but such a confederation may not be specifically banned, as some officers have recommended. Videla presumably hopes the workers will recognize and accept the new law as a compromise, permitting the unions some, but by no means all, the importance they have had in the past.

**The Government and Civilians**

Conditions also seem favorable for implementing Videla's policy of encouraging communication with representative civilians. At the meeting with army generals, the President indicated that he intends to continue this process, but made it clear that he envisions no program formally reincorporating civilians into the governing process. This is in keeping with Videla's public statements; he has repeatedly declared that he has no timetable for the reemergence of an elected legislature or free political parties.

Civilian opinion leaders will be disappointed—but not surprised—that the political "opening" many of them had begun to predict some weeks ago is not around the corner. Most of them will take heart, however, at least privately, from the fact that Videla and not one of the hard-line generals is in the driver's seat.

**Counterinsurgency**

The strengthening of Videla's hand does not mean any slackening of pressure against leftist guerrillas. Here, Videla is not, and cannot afford to be, any less tough than the "hard liners."

The President may attempt to make sure that the security forces pay more attention to legal guarantees, and he could justify this approach to the "hard liners" by arguing that the subversive threat had been so obviously hurt by the government's campaign that the harsh measures were no longer necessary. Any resurgence of the terrorism, however, would force Videla to get tougher.

**Hemisphere Affairs**

In his first year in office Videla has visited the capitals of Chile, Peru, and Bolivia. He plans trips to Venezuela and Paraguay.

He is clearly making the point that after a period of enforced withdrawal from hemispheric affairs because of domestic political turmoil, Argentina is now ready to claim its rightful place as an important regional power. The message Videla carries to the heads of other authoritarian governments in the area is one of solidarity in the face of international pressure for greater respect for human rights.

The General is well suited to the task of rebuilding his country's influence in the region without antagonizing Brazil, the historic rival that has pulled far ahead of Argentina by almost any measure. With his reserved style, Videla seeks to assure the Brazilians that his country is not out to make gains at their expense. For the moment, at least, the Brazilians probably take him at his word, seeing virtually no prospect for Argentina to contest seriously the regional dominance Brazil has established.

**Outlook**

The military consensus that Videla has established is fragile. The officers who have in the past been the most troublesome to Videla, navy chief Admiral Massera, for example, are quiet, at least for now. Still, Massera has a long history as a "spoiler," and he is not likely to remain in the background indefinitely.

Political conditions in the country could change, perhaps rapidly, with disruptive effects on military unity. Organized labor could react violently if a new labor code is not forthcoming soon or if it is enacted and, in their view, is too restrictive. Terrorists may launch a spectacular last-ditch offensive. Such events would reinforce the hard-line officers and weaken Videla.

Videla recognizes the frailty of the consensus. He will continue to move with great caution on all fronts in order to preserve it. Policy making and implementation will continue to be slow and cumbersome and could falter if the regime were to be confronted with fast-breaking problems.

*President Videla*

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